

COINS

Confederate bills: Worthless or worth saving?

By Roger Boye

Here are answers to more questions about coins and paper money.

Q — What can you tell me about Confederate currency? I have several old bills and would like to know how much they are worth to collectors.

—L.A., Chicago

A — During the Civil War, the Confederate government printed at least 70 different types of currency with a total face value of more than \$1.6 billion. Federal troops burned millions of the bills immediately after the war because the money no longer had value.

In recent years, Confederate currency has become a popular collectible; bills sell today for from 75 cents to several hundred dollars each, depending on the design and condition. If you send me copies of your bills, I'll evaluate them for you.

By the way, don't be surprised if I tell you the bills are worthless reproductions. Over the years, many businessmen have printed fake Confederate bills on brown, crinkled paper and have sold them as souvenirs. Most experts agree that the imitations outnumber authentic bills.

Q — I think I've hit the jackpot. While looking over my 1975 proof sets, I discovered that the penny, nickel, and dime are dated 1975, but the quarter, half and dollar are 1776-1976. Am I rich?

— C.S., Wood Dale

A — Sorry, but your proof sets are quite normal. Government workers made no quarters, halves, or dollars dated 1975. Instead, they started minting Bicentennial coins that year, and put them in 1975 proof sets. Dealers in Chicago sell 1975 proof sets for about \$20 each.

Q — Could you recommend an easy-to-use reference listing the collector value of U.S. coins, especially coins made of silver? Please, I don't want to spend a fortune.

— A.F., Quincy

A — Coin Prices magazine should satisfy your needs. It includes the current retail values for all U.S.

coins, each in several condition categories. The magazine (published six times a year) is sold locally in some coin shops, or you can order a copy by sending \$2 to Krause Publications, 700 E. State St., Iola, Wis. 54990.

Q — Has the U.S. Mint discontinued making half dollars? If so, why? I rarely see the coin and it was so useful.

— A.W., Chicago

A — The government still produces half dollars, lots of them. Nearly 77.6 million rolled off the presses during 1980, and the Mint plans to make more this year. Half dollars don't circulate much because people find them too heavy to carry, but the coins are available at most banks on request.

Q — With so many Susan B. Anthony dollars lying idle in the Federal Reserve banks, what alternatives are being considered to make the coin acceptable? I hope Susie B. won't be disappointed much longer.

— J.L., Elk Grove Village

A — Experts are considering several rescue proposals that include adding a large number "1" to the tails side to signify "one dollar," changing the color of the coin so people won't confuse it with a quarter, launching a national publicity campaign to make Americans aware of the coin, and encouraging businesses and banks to distribute the coin daily when making change.

Q — Do you know who to write in Rome to order coins with the likeness of Pope John Paul II?

— W.Z., Schiller Park

A — For ordering information, write to the Numismatic Office and Vatican Branch Post Office, St. Peter's Square, Rome, Italy. Some Chicago-area coin-dealers sell Vatican City coins, too, but you might have to pay a higher price for them.

Q — As I was looking at my small coin collection, I noticed a 1955 zinc-colored penny. I thought the government minted zinc pennies in 1943 only. Is my 1955 coin a "rare"?

— H.H., Lansing

A — Official reports indicate that the government did not produce any zinc pennies in 1955. Thus, someone must have treated your coin with a chemical or coated it with a light-colored substance. It would have no collector value.

Q — Again this year, the British government is using a New Jersey office to sell its proof sets to U.S. collectors. Each 1981 set costs \$26 and contains six coins ranging in denomination from $\frac{1}{2}$ to 50 pence. For ordering information, write to the British Royal Mint, 128 Passaic Av., Fairfield, N.J. 07006.